

Chapter 23

North East School Division No. 200—Increasing Grade 3 Students Reading at Grade Level

1.0 MAIN POINTS

North East School Division No. 200 has improved its processes to increase the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level by implementing four of five recommendations, and partially implementing the remaining recommendation made in our 2016 audit. North East still needs to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of all the tools it uses to assess student reading levels.

By January 2018, North East documented all of its key risks and strategies for managing these risks related to increasing the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level. It had sufficient guidance for exempting students from provincial reading level assessments. The Division also publicly provided data and analysis of Grade 3 student reading levels.

Grade 3 reading levels are considered a leading indicator of future student performance. Grade 3 students who do not make the transition to comprehending what they read fall behind, impacting their overall success. In the Education Sector Strategic Plan, Saskatchewan's education sector jointly established a goal of 80% of Grade 3 students reading at grade level by 2020.

While North East School Division No. 200 has not yet reached the education sector plan goal, it has seen improvement in the number of Grade 3 students reading at grade level. At June 2017, 74% of North East Grade 3 students were reading at or above grade level,¹ as compared to 65% at June 2015.²

This improvement is supported by the Division's processes to improve reading outcomes for the approximately 1,500 Kindergarten to Grade 3 students from Nipawin, Tisdale, Hudson Bay, Melfort, and the surrounding area.³

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes our follow up of management's actions on the recommendations we made in 2016.

In 2016, we assessed North East School Division No. 200's processes to increase Grade 3 students reading at grade level. Our *2016 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 11 concluded that for the 12-month period ended December 31, 2015, North East School Division No. 200 had, except in the areas of our recommendations, effective processes to increase the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level to meet the Education Sector Strategic Plan goal of 80% by 2020. We made five recommendations.

¹ North East School Division No. 200, *2016-17 Annual Report*, p. 14.

² North East School Division No. 200, *2014-15 Annual Report*, p. 13.

³ North East School Division No. 200, *2016-17 Annual Report*, p. 29.



To conduct this follow-up audit, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook – Assurance* (including CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Division's progress towards meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. The Division agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

To perform our follow up, we discussed actions taken with Division management and school staff. We reviewed the Division and selected schools' planning documents and public reports. We discussed risks and exemptions with Division staff, and reviewed training materials and correspondence provided by the Ministry of Education.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of each recommendation at January 29, 2018, and North East's actions up to that date. We found that the Division had implemented four recommendations and partially implemented one recommendation.

3.1 Risks Assessed and Mitigated

We recommended that North East School Division No. 200 document all of its key risks related to increasing the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level. (2016 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 14, 2016)

Status – Implemented

We recommended that North East School Division No. 200 document strategies for managing identified risks related to increasing the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level. (2016 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 14, 2016)

Status – Implemented

North East documented all of its key risks and strategies for managing those risks related to increasing the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level.

We found action plans documented risks affecting North East's ability to improve Grade 3 students reading at grade level based on the action plans that we reviewed for three selected schools and the Division office. These action plans also documented mitigation strategies for the identified risks. We confirmed that the action plans identified all significant risks through discussions with Division management, and school staff.

3.2 Guidance Provided for Exempting Students

We recommended that North East School Division No. 200 work with other school divisions to develop additional guidance for exempting students from provincial reading level assessments. (2016 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 14, 2016)

Status – Intent of Recommendation Implemented

We found that, at January 29, 2018, North East had sufficient guidance to consistently determine which students should be exempted from provincial reading level assessments. Since our 2016 audit, the Ministry of Education has provided more guidance to school divisions about when to exempt students from provincial reading level assessments.

The Ministry provides general guidance on exemptions in the *Saskatchewan Reads* document.⁴ The document suggests exempting students from the provincial reading assessment when their English proficiency is below a certain level, or when participation would be potentially harmful or infeasible (e.g., students with severe emotional or behavioural difficulties).⁵

In 2016-17, the Ministry provided reading assessment training to school divisions, which included additional guidance on exempting students from assessments. We found that the Ministry also monitored which students North East was exempting, and North East gave the Ministry explanations for each student exempted from provincial reading level assessments.

3.3 Evaluation of All Assessment Tools Needed

We recommended that North East School Division No. 200 periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the tools it uses to assess student reading levels. (2016 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 14, 2016)

Status – Partially Implemented

We found that, while the Division had formally evaluated one of its assessment tools, it had not evaluated all of the tools it uses to assess student reading levels.

The Ministry allows school divisions to assess Grade 3 reading levels using several variations of the Diagnostic Levelled Reading assessment, which it has benchmarked so data is comparable between the variations.⁶

During the 2016-17 school year, the Division compared the variation it uses to another available variation. As part of this evaluation, North East determined advantages and disadvantages of the variation it currently uses and the comparison variation.

⁴ <https://saskatchewanreads.wordpress.com/> (05 February 2018).

⁵ Provincial Reading Team, *Saskatchewan Reads*, (2015), p. 81.

⁶ The Diagnostic Levelled Reading assessment measures fluency and comprehension (within the text [e.g., retell events, main idea, details, character setting, problem] and beyond the text [e.g., inferencing, connections, opinions]).



The Division also uses another tool to assess student reading comprehension strategies (i.e., Reading Assessment District).⁷ It does not have to report this data to the Ministry. While we found evidence that the Division had informally discussed the value of this tool, as of January 29, 2018, North East had not formally evaluated this assessment tool, and did not have plans about when it would formally do so.

Not periodically evaluating this reading assessment tool increases the risk that teachers and students do not use time efficiently and may spend more time on assessments that do not help to significantly increase student reading levels.

3.4 Public Reporting on Results

We recommended that North East School Division No. 200 publicly provide the reasons for differences between planned and actual results for Grade 3 student reading levels, along with key resulting changes to action plans. (2016 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 14, 2016)

Status – Implemented

The Division publicly provides data and analysis of Grade 3 student reading levels in its annual report and through publicly accessible Board of Education meeting packages. Our review of the Division and selected schools' action plans found they include plans for addressing differences between planned and actual reading level results.

⁷ The Reading Assessment District assesses students up to Grade 9 on their comprehension strategies (e.g., prediction, main ideas and details, inferencing, opinions). In addition, it measures students' understanding of cognitive strategies to comprehend (e.g., reread, sound out, look at context cues, make connection to other words or contexts) using a formal test developed by a publishing company.